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HOUGAN ANTI-HERO

**Jim Hougan
says yes . . .**

It's incredible. Millions of dollars have been spent investigating Watergate. A president has been forced out of office. Dozens of lives have been ruined. We're sitting in the can. And still nobody can explain why they bugged the place to begin with.

— Charles Colson to John Dean, in federal prison, 1974

By Glenn Garvin
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

So you think you know about Watergate, buddy? Think you heard it all? Think just because half a dozen congressional committees thrashed it out for three years, and the FBI launched the largest investigation in its history, and 150 books have been published, that you got the facts?

Think that when Nixon resigned, and all those other guys went to jail — you think that was the end of it? Well, wipe that smirk off your smug face, buster, because Jim Hougan's got a new one for you:

The Watergate bugging never happened!

And he doesn't stop there. The CIA was spying on the White House. The Democratic National Committee office was a whorehouse. And The Washington Post's Pulitzer Prize for Watergate should — maybe — be over in McLean, Va., hanging inside a CIA trophy case.

Before you put this down to read something a little more solidly grounded in reality, like the horoscope or the Commentary section, you ought to know that Hougan's got a couple of thousand pages of previously secret FBI documents, along with some choice CIA memos, to back him up on a number of these points.

*Was the CIA
behind Watergate?
And did it botch
the break-in
deliberately?*

Does this make you a little dizzy? Even faintly nauseated? Will we never be rid of the damn thing? Well, it's hurting Hougan more than it's hurting you.

"Do you think this is easy for me, talking about Watergate 10 years later?" he says, pacing the floor of his tidy Adams Morgan office. "I've just spent five years looking at the events leading up to the cover-up. I haven't even gotten to the cover-up yet. Woodward and Bernstein spent about one year reporting on Watergate, the whole thing. And I've spent five years on the burglary alone."

He stops, finally, to gaze out the window. "You bet I'm sick of it," he murmurs, still peering down into the street.

But that didn't stop him from writing "Secret Agenda: Watergate, Deep Throat and the CIA," published a couple of weeks ago by Random House. And it hasn't stopped the legions of Watergate cultists from reopening their fine old debate: What did [fill in the blank with your favorite co-conspirator] know and when did he know it?

But "Secret Agenda" is much more than just another Watergate book. It is a rich tapestry of conspiracies, with layer upon layer of intrigue, plots within plots, subterfuge on top of artifice on top of machination. It is a book that makes you want to bang your head every few pages. Trying to summarize it is a fool's errand, but the bare bones go something like this:

- Two key Watergate figures, E. Howard Hunt and James McCord — who claimed to be retired from the CIA — were still secret agents even after they went to work for President Nixon in 1972. Although the two men claimed to have met for the first time in that year, when Hunt began working at the White House and McCord at the Nixon re-election committee, in fact they had worked together as early as 1963, helping to plan covert CIA activities against Cuban leader Fidel Castro.

- Hunt was spying on his White House co-workers, and passing packages of information about their personal lives along to the CIA.

- Unknown to the other Watergate conspirators, McCord — who lived in Rockville, Md. — rented a Chevy Chase apartment that Hunt and various "young girls" often visited, and where a great deal of bugging equipment was kept. Hougan speculates that was part of some other, as-yet-undisclosed, CIA operation.

- At the time of the Watergate burglary, there was a call-girl ring operating in the Columbia Plaza apartments, three blocks from the Watergate. The hookers had a recruiting agent working at the Democratic National Committee offices in the Watergate, who used a DNC phone — the same one the burglars allegedly bugged — to set up dates between Democrats and the prostitutes.

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